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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on how Wisconsin built up work requirements in Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) prior to both Wisconsin Works (W-2) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). It suggests that Wisconsin is an example to other states and that Wisconsin provides a good test of the top-down hypothesis about the implementation of government programs. Top-down models of implementation predict that a program will achieve its formal goals more fully when the political and financial resources behind it increase and policy design improves. The study confirms that prediction in the case of implementing welfare work requirements in Wisconsin. Welfare work programs in the state had little impact on dependency up through the mid-1980s because work was not a priority in welfare policy, and work programs were underdeveloped. In 1985-86, however, the state sharply increased funding and built up the job search bureaucracy. It required that more recipients participate in work programs, enter jobs rather than education, and avoid welfare if possible. It also attuned the bureaucracy to its goals using funding incentives. Improved work requirements, along with strong economic conditions, then helped drive down the welfare rolls. (Contains 54 references.) (SM)

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Implementing Work Requirements in Wisconsin

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Abstract

Top-down models of implementation predict that a program will achieve its formal goals more fully when the political and financial resources behind it increase and policy design improves. This study confirms that expectation in the case of implementing welfare work requirements in Wisconsin. Welfare work programs in the state had little impact on dependency up through the mid-1980s because work was not a priority in welfare policy and work programs were underdeveloped. In 1985–86, however, the state sharply increased funding and built up the job search bureaucracy. It required that more recipients participate in work programs, enter jobs rather than education, and avoid welfare if possible. It also attuned the bureaucracy to its goals using funding incentives. Improved work requirements, along with strong economic conditions, then helped drive down the welfare rolls.

Implementing Work Requirements in Wisconsin

Successful social programs spring only partly from good policymaking. Consider welfare, namely Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the family assistance program once called Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Under the Family Support Act of 1988 and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996, which created TANF, federal policy has pressured states, as a condition of federal funding, to require that more welfare adults work in return for support. This policy *appears* to be successful. The welfare rolls have fallen by over half since 1994. Poverty has also fallen, and work levels have risen among the poor. But the decline is also due to exceptionally favorable economic conditions, which allow many welfare adults to find jobs (Ellwood, 1999).

States say that they are implementing work requirements vigorously (Nathan and Gais, 1999), but how far they have changed local welfare operations to incorporate this demand is unclear. Unless the new requirements are made real to recipients "on the ground," they will remain exercises in symbolism (Wiseman, 1987). The implementation of work tests is complex. Recipients must receive support while being referred to employment programs, where they have to receive child care and other services in order to participate. Enough of the recipients must participate so that work becomes not exceptional but a routine part of welfare. Then the employable will seek work on their own, allowing welfare to concentrate on serving the most disadvantaged. These demands have often proven insuperable in the past. Northern states with large caseloads tend to have large welfare agencies that are difficult to change, while Southern states commonly lack the bureaucratic resources to implement work tests seriously. Overcoming these limitations is the chief challenge facing welfare managers (Nathan, 1993).

Wisconsin is one state that clearly has rebuilt its welfare system around work. The state is well-known for pioneering innovations in welfare, especially its new Wisconsin Works (W-2) system. Among state welfare policies instituted under PRWORA, W-2 is unique in conditioning all aid on work, paying the same grant to all sizes of families, and deducting no aid for child support paid to the family

(Gallagher et al., 1998). I focus here on how Wisconsin built up work requirements in AFDC prior to both W-2 and TANF. Indeed, most of the AFDC caseload had already confronted a serious work demand and left the rolls prior to the start of W-2 in 1997.

I have two purposes. First, Wisconsin is an example to other states. Few other jurisdictions have sought to establish a radically new welfare system as Wisconsin has. But many currently are seeking to improve work enforcement. Wisconsin shows one way to do that. Other states are acting well behind Wisconsin in time, but they face similar challenges, so the Wisconsin story remains relevant. Second, Wisconsin provides an excellent test of the "top-down" hypothesis about the implementation of government programs.

THE IMPLEMENTATION PROBLEM

How can policymakers who establish a new program ensure that it is carried out as intended? Implementation first appeared as a serious difficulty in American antipoverty policy in the 1970s. Many Great Society programs failed to achieve their ends, and one reason was that they were not carried out as designed. The early literature on the problem was pessimistic and pluralistic. Social programs were thought to fail because the problems they addressed were intractable, or because the local agencies that ran them could not be controlled from above. Local implementers inevitably imposed their own priorities, even if higher-level jurisdictions paid the bills (Nelson, 1977; Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973).

Later, a more authoritative view developed that programs could achieve their formal goals if they were better designed, that is, based on a better understanding of the problem. Also, top-level actors must put enough political will and money behind them, and lower-level agencies must be competent and motivated (Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1983). Still later, a more sophisticated view arose that top-level actors would control a program when certain conditions were met, particularly that goals were agreed upon, and lower-level actors would dominate when they were not (Sabatier, 1986; Goggin et al., 1990; Matland, 1995).

My hypothesis is drawn from the top-down perspective. It is that Wisconsin's welfare work programs began to succeed when they met the three main conditions suggested by the top-down paradigm: political will, economic resources, and effective design. Despite capable bureaucracy, the state's welfare work programs had little effect on the caseload up through the 1980s. This was mainly because the state accepted growing dependency and showed limited commitment to work programs. But in the mid-1980s, a political consensus formed to enforce work, and spending to do this increased. The state also redesigned programs to require that more recipients participate, enter jobs rather than education and training, and avoid welfare altogether.

Top-down change is not the whole story. In other research, I have shown how several Wisconsin counties, notably Kenosha, helped develop the welfare reform programs that were later adopted by the state. Overall, the implementation of reform involved an interaction between the center and periphery, with each reacting to innovation by the other (Mead, 2000b). My focus here is on the top-down part of that story—how the state government toughened work policies to make a work requirement real throughout the state.

Earlier research discusses what policy and bureaucratic decisions states make to institute work requirements, but without hard evidence of how programs changed at the service level (Hagen and Lurie, 1994; Norris and Thompson, 1995; Nathan and Gais, 1999; Weissert, 2000). Some recent studies describe administrative changes designed to raise work levels at the service level, but only in the mid-1990s (Pavetti, Holcomb, and Duke, 1995; U.S. General Accounting Office, 1997b; U.S. General Accounting Office, 1998). There are evaluations of work programs that discuss their implementation to a limited extent (Gueron and Pauly, 1991). Other studies—including one on Wisconsin—probe their implementation in more depth, but at one point in time (Mead, 1997; Meyers, Glaser, and Mac Donald, 1998). There is, however, no published research that I know that traces the implementation of work requirements longitudinally, in detail, using program data. Only by following a policy over several years, tracking the specific changes in the bureaucracy, and showing results for services can we understand

administrative statecraft. How, driven by political decision and money, do programs evolve so as to accomplish the will of the community?

My sources for the study include program data, state documents explaining work policies, and interviews with Wisconsin officials in Madison and in ten counties between 1987 and 2000 (chiefly in 1994–1997). In the sections following, I cover the early growth of the state's welfare work programs, the buildup of funding and reporting systems that transformed the programs after the mid-1980s, and the policy changes that gave the bureaucracy rising authority over the caseload. I also discuss how state officials used incentives to attune the bureaucracy to their goals. Other research shows that improved implementation helped cause greater job entries, caseload fall, and other favorable effects. Finally, I discuss some qualifications and implications.

EARLY WELFARE WORK PROGRAMS

Wisconsin derives a capable bureaucracy from its Progressive past. As a result, it has excelled at all the national programs that have attempted to promote work in welfare. The oldest of these is the Employment Service (ES), now known as the Job Service. Established in 1933, the ES is a federally funded labor exchange that helps voluntary jobseekers find employment. Federal funding for state programs depends in part on how well they perform in generating job entries in the private sector. Research in the 1970s found that the ES in Wisconsin exemplified the most efficient form of ES organization. It had personnel who approached their task analytically and managers who delegated heavily to the staff serving the clients, while also holding them accountable for results (Chadwin et al., 1977). In 1967, Congress created the Work Incentive (WIN) program to place employable welfare recipients in work or training. The control of WIN was vested jointly in the ES, which did the job placement, and in state and local welfare departments, which provided child care and other support services. Again, Wisconsin had an exemplary organization (Mitchell, Chadwin, and Nightingale, 1980; Schmitt, 1996).

Yet Wisconsin's work programs failed in the sense that they did not restrain dependency. The number of people on AFDC in Wisconsin rose steadily from 213,000 in 1980 to 301,000 in 1986. In 1980, Wisconsin had 4.5 percent of its people on AFDC, the nation 4.6 percent. By 1986, the figures had changed to 6.3 and 4.6 percent, respectively (data from the U.S. Administration for Children and Families and the Census Bureau). Wisconsin's rise reflected the recession of the early 1980s and the insistence of the state government on raising AFDC benefit levels. Higher grants allowed increasing numbers to qualify for aid. But work programs also lacked a political mandate. Dependency was not yet widely controversial.

There were bureaucratic problems as well. As in other states, the ES in Wisconsin proved less capable at placing welfare recipients in jobs than welfare officials wanted. WIN was a mandatory program in which, at least in theory, a welfare recipient could be required to participate as a condition of aid. The ES's routines, however, had been formed around helping voluntary jobseekers find work. So it gave lower priority to serving the mandatory clients that WIN referred to it. WIN also faced problems getting the employment and welfare sides of the program—often in different places and run by different agencies—to work together.

In response to these dissatisfactions, Congress, in the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA) of 1981, allowed states to replace WIN with a "WIN Demonstration Program" wholly controlled by the welfare department. This Wisconsin did in 1983, when it inaugurated the Wisconsin Employment Opportunity Program (WEOP). Control was vested in the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), the state welfare department. But since DHSS still contracted with the ES for job search services, little change resulted.

In addition, WIN's funding was reduced by Reagan-era cuts. In part, WEOP was a response to this, as it concentrated mainly on job search and dispensed with much of the costlier education and training that WIN had provided. Wisconsin augmented WEOP with other work-oriented activities that had been permitted by OBRA, such as employment search and the Community Work Experience Program (CWEP), in which recipients "worked off" their grants in government jobs. However, due to the

cuts, by the mid-1980s WEOP's staff fell from 300 to 100 and the program could serve only 22 of Wisconsin's 72 counties (Corbett, 1995, p. 34).

THE BUILDUP BEGINS

Work programs changed, first, because politics changed. In 1985–86, legislators of both parties grew alarmed at the growing rolls and formed a consensus to promote work in welfare (Mead, 2000c). The first decision was to build up welfare work programs. In 1986, legislators created the Work Experience and Job Training (WEJT) program, backing it with state money. WEJT aimed to be broader than WEOP, by providing more education and training as well as CWEP, and also to reach more of the caseload. Control of it was firmly vested in DHSS, demoting the ES to a contractor's role in some counties.

At the end of 1986, Republican Tommy Thompson won the Wisconsin governorship, partly on the welfare issue, ousting a liberal Democratic incumbent. Thompson, backed by a bipartisan coalition in the legislature, initiated a series of welfare experiments that led, over a decade, to W-2. As a first step, DHSS seized on WEJT to expand participation in welfare work activities. The program was instituted first in five counties in 1987, then by 1989 in 33 counties, including all the largest ones. By 1990, either WEJT or a combination of CWEP and job search was running in every country (Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau, 1991, p. 22).

WEJT gave the state a running start on implementing the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training Program (JOBS), the next welfare work structure to come down from Washington. JOBS, which resembled WEJT, was established by the Family Support Act (FSA) of 1988. Where WIN had obliged mothers to participate when their youngest child turned 6, JOBS lowered this to 3, allowing it to involve more of the caseload. The new program also provided more funding for training, education, and child care.

Wisconsin was the first state to lodge its JOBS plan with Washington (Wiseman, 1999, p. 16), and it was one of 14 states that implemented the program in July 1989, the earliest possible date (data from the U.S. Administration for Children and Families). The plan was approved, the state noted, "because we had in place the required aspects of the program in a majority of counties" (Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services [DHSS], 1990, p. 2). By July 1990, JOBS was operating throughout Wisconsin. WEJT and other earlier programs were folded into it. The state now could make a work obligation real on the ground. As one state official remarked to me, "The JOBS program was everywhere, and no one was exempt because JOBS did not exist."

BUILDING THE BUREAUCRACY

The new work programs aimed to put more recipients to work and reduce the welfare rolls, and in that sense to reduce the size of government. But to achieve this, paradoxically, the bureaucracy had first to grow. This it did, by expanding its staff and management information capacities, even at the expense of high administrative costs. The governor readily agreed with the legislature on this. In Wisconsin, Republicans are less antigovernment than in much of the rest of the country. Thompson criticized traditional welfare, but not the bureaucracy itself. He gave a "clear direction" for change, one state official remarked, and this had a "huge impact on staff."

Funding

WIN and JOBS received federal funds under matching formulas. These monies were insufficient to implement WEJT and then JOBS in the manner Wisconsin wished, however, so extra funds were provided. The first five counties to start WEJT received $1.8 million from Madison to serve 3,500 clients. By 1990, WEJT cost $36 million to serve 50,000 clients (Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau, 1991, pp. 22–26). This went well beyond previous WIN and WEOP funding.

In JOBS, the state gave counties $1,200, later $1,400, per case to run the program annually. Each county also received a child care grant of about 17 percent of its JOBS grant. The state was prepared to

expand WEJT from 1989 on even if it spent more money than Washington would match with federal funds. It also doled out extra funds for special needs—such as meeting federal standards for a 40 percent participation rate in the two-parent part of AFDC, to raise participation rates in Milwaukee, and to ensure that counties' JOBS funding would not drop just because caseloads were now falling (Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau, 1989, p. 3; Wisconsin DHSS, 1990, p. 11; Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau, 1995, pp. 21, 24). These increases were the more remarkable because the caseload fell from 1986 onward but for a brief rise during the recession of 1991–92, so one might have expected funding to fall too.

Overall, Wisconsin's spending vastly exceeded its usual federal funds. Using 1995 dollars, the state's JOBS authorization grew only moderately, from $24.5 million in 1990 to $28.2 million in 1995 (calculated from JOBS data in U.S. Congress, 1991–1996). But the state's overall spending on training and employment soared from about $15 million in 1988 to over $80 million in 1995. The rise was particularly steep in 1988–90, during the launching of WEJT and JOBS (Wiseman, 1996, pp. 529–530). Outlays specifically for welfare-to-work programs grew from $13 million to $43 million (Corbett, 1995, p. 27).

How much of the extra money was Wisconsin's is unclear. Some of it came from a "waiver savings" deal that Governor Thompson negotiated with Washington in 1987. Under this arrangement, some $148 million of the economies imputed to his experiments, carried out under suspensions of normal federal rules, became available to the state over the years 1987 to 1997 (Wiseman, 1996, pp. 524–525). But since the money came as matching funds for state spending, Wisconsin still had to invest much of its own money to create its welfare work network.

Separate figures on personnel are unavailable, but state officials say that much of the new money went simply to hiring more staff for welfare work programs so that they could involve the caseload more fully. By 1994, state and local JOBS workers told me in interviews that case managers in the program typically had caseloads of around 150 clients each, ranging from 75–80 in small counties to 300 in Milwaukee, the largest city. This is below the typical numbers found in other WIN and JOBS programs I

have studied, especially in urban settings. During the buildup of the late 1980s, Wisconsin's caseload was already falling. Smaller caseloads allowed staff to oversee their remaining cases more closely. That allowed them to help and motivate yet more clients to get jobs or dispense with welfare. Thus, as one official put it, the growing bureaucracy "ratcheted" the caseload down. Many other states, where limited funding was a constraint on JOBS, were less fortunate (Hagen and Lurie, 1994).

Management Information Systems

Wisconsin also made critical investments in computerized management information systems. The process of rationalizing these systems went back to the 1970s, when the state combined the paperwork for applying to AFDC, Food Stamps, and Medicaid. It computerized much of case management operations for these programs using a Computer Reporting Network. CRN, which streamlined data collection and case decisions across the state, was the most advanced such system in the country (Corbett, 1995, p. 21).

CRN had the limitation, however, that it covered only the eligibility and grant payment side of welfare. As employment activity became more important, the state built up reporting systems in that area. At the time of WEOP, local work offices monitored client assignments using a Job Service Information System that was based on the ES's Employment Security Automated Reporting System. ESARS recorded how many clients were in certain statuses within offices, but it did not allow managers to track individual cases as CRN did. An improved Work Programs Reporting System was implemented in 1989–90 in order to run JOBS, but it still had no connection to CRN or the welfare side of the system. And as the welfare department took total control of work programs in most localities, the ES's systems were no longer available.

Finally in 1994, the state implemented the Client Assistance for Reemployment and Economic Support system. CARES automates the input of client data and the calculation of benefits. It encompasses both the claims payment and work sides of welfare. This fact reflects the welfare department's dominance of work programs. CARES records clients' activities within work programs,

although not the features of private jobs they enter. The system is complicated, its implementation was troubled, and it had to be modified for W-2 in 1997. But it was still an improvement and a better system than many states had (Kaplan, 2000, pp. 104–105).

Administrative Costs

One apparent downside to the bureaucratic buildup was a dramatic rise in administrative costs. Overall in welfare, Wisconsin appears efficient. If one looks at Medicaid (the health program for the poor) and Food Stamps as well as AFDC, and if one considers all the fiscal years between 1989 and 1993, the state spent $148.96 in federal matching funds to administer each case annually, compared to a national average of $159.30. In 1993, administration ate up only 4.8 percent of federal program costs in Wisconsin, compared to 5.8 percent for the nation as a whole (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1995, Tables 1 and 8).

But state and local costs specifically to run AFDC exploded. In 1986, prior to the WEJT buildup and the Thompson reforms, Wisconsin spent only $10.56 on administration per month per AFDC case, the lowest figure in the country. By 1994, however, that amount had soared to $61.55, only 37th best among states. Wisconsin's proportional increase since 1986—almost six times—was far and away the largest in the country (U.S. Administration for Children and Families, 1995, p. 7). Much of this cost went for the new personnel and bureaucratic apparatus, including reporting systems, needed to run Wisconsin's elaborate welfare reform programs.

In return for these expenses, however, the state promoted an equally dramatic drop in welfare dependency. Between the state's budget for 1987–88 and the budget for 1993–94, overall costs for welfare in current-dollar terms rose 61 percent, or $1.2 billion, but much of this was accounted for by Medicaid, the huge and costly health program for the needy. If one focuses just on AFDC and closely linked programs for work and other purposes, spending dropped by 11 percent, or $68 million, largely because of smaller grant payments due to the caseload fall as well as higher child support collections

(data from Wisconsin DHSS). Thus, from the time of WEJT, Wisconsin invested millions in stronger government to get control of welfare. At least in financial terms, that gamble paid off.

RAISING PARTICIPATION

Armed with these bureaucratic resources, the state was in a position to change the design of work programs so that they promoted work more effectively. Experts had debated whether welfare work programs should be voluntary or mandatory (Lynn, 1989), but it was apparent by the late 1980s that mandatory programs generated larger effects (Hamilton and Friedlander, 1989). The key to higher performance was to raise participation. This Wisconsin did with rule changes that obligated more recipients to participate in WEJT or JOBS, and for more hours.

JOBS had lowered the age of the youngest child to 3 at which a mother had to participate, but even then the program was mandatory for only 41–44 percent of welfare adults (data from U.S. Administration for Children and Families). Wisconsin, however, obtained a waiver from Washington in 1987 that allowed it to obligate mothers when the youngest child turned 1. Under this authority, the state in 1988 set the age at 2, then in 1995 lowered it to 1. This meant that a large majority of mothers were now required to work.

Hours of participation in JOBS were normally limited to 20 a week, or half time, but Wisconsin's waiver allowed it to increase the demand to as much as 40 hours. The state began to demand 35 hours of effort a week in Milwaukee in 1995, and in 1996 an expectation of as much as 40 hours was instituted statewide. The full-time standard was set as part of Pay for Performance (PFP), a reform of 1996 that anticipated W-2 in expecting welfare parents to work as hard as taxpayers on a regular basis.

Pressure was put on the contractors running JOBS and on the clients to meet these standards. Most of the contractors were county welfare departments. As of 1994, they were expected to serve 80 percent of the recipients referred to them by the income maintenance side of welfare. I discuss below the financial incentives that backed this up. Monitoring of client compliance also increased. Traditionally,

recipients subject to work obligations had been allowed two failures to report to assignments before the state began proceedings to "sanction" them (i.e., reduce their grants). In 1995, that was cut to one. The penalty for noncompliance also rose. Traditionally, only the share of the cash grant attributable to the adult who failed to cooperate was cut; benefits continued for the rest of the family, including children. As part of PFP, however, the state changed to full-family sanctions. Benefits were now reduced by the minimum wage (then $4.25) for each hour by which a participant's activities fell short of his or her assignment, and if they fell below 25 percent of assigned hours, the entire grant was cancelled. The family could still, however, obtain Food Stamps and Medicaid.

Under JOBS, states were supposed to achieve certain activity levels among recipients on pain of reductions in their federal funding. Seven percent of recipients judged "mandatory" for JOBS were supposed to participate in 1990, rising to 20 percent by 1995. Wisconsin was more ambitious. In addition to changing the rules for clients, Madison pressed the counties to raise participation rates. Table 1 shows the percentages of AFDC adults mandatory for JOBS for 1991 through 1996 and two measures of participation in JOBS, for Wisconsin and for the median state in the nation. The first participation rate is the official JOBS measure—roughly, the share of mandatory adults meeting the 20-hour standard. The second is the share of welfare adults, mandatory or not, who participated in JOBS to any extent.

The figures show that Wisconsin did not classify an unusual percentage of its welfare adults as mandatory for JOBS in the early 1990s, but the figures rose sharply to two-thirds by 1996, reflecting the above rule changes. In JOBS participation, the state was consistently well above the median state, especially at the beginning and end of the period, and even further above JOBS standards. In overall participation, Wisconsin dipped close to the median state in 1993–94, but again soared well above by 1995–96. In JOBS participation in 1996, Wisconsin ranked eighth; among larger, more urban states, only Florida, Oregon, and Washington scored above it. In overall participation in 1996, Wisconsin was fourth, with only three small rural states ahead (data from U.S. Administration for Children and Families). Between 1994 and 1996, Wisconsin raised its overall participation by nearly 23 percentage points. This was the greatest increase in the nation by 10 points.

TABLE 1
Rates of JOBS Mandatoriness and Participation among AFDC Adults in Wisconsin and the Median State, 1991–1996

	Wisconsin			Median State		
Year	Percentage of AFDC Adults Mandatory for JOBS	JOBS Participation Rate	Overall Participation Rate	Percentage of AFDC Adults Mandatory for JOBS	JOBS Participation Rate	Overall Participation Rate
1991	40.1%	38.8%	24.7%	39.9%	14.8%	12.7
1992	52.7	33.3	20.9	39.3	17.7	12.4
1993	40.4	30.9	14.5	43.6	17.9	12.5
1994	40.7	31.7	14.2	41.6	20.8	13.1
1995	56.5	35.5	23.6	42.1	27.6	15.4
1996	66.7	60.6	37.0	42.6	33.0	19.4

Sources: U.S. Administration for Children and Families; U.S. Congress, *1994 Green Book: Background Material and Data on Programs within the Jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, July 15, 1994), pp. 357–359; U.S. Congress, *1998 Green Book* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, May 19, 1998), pp. 484–486.

Note: Data are for federal fiscal years. The JOBS participation rate is the percentage of mandatory adults participating in JOBS for required hours. The overall participation rate is the percentage of all AFDC adults participating in JOBS at any level.

TOWARD WORK FIRST

Other rule changes reoriented JOBS from an emphasis on education and training and toward employment in available jobs. When the program began in the late 1980s, most experts believed that the best way to overcome dependency and poverty among poor families was to improve the skills of parents so that they could get better jobs. This view was reflected in JOBS, whose rules favored assignment to education for parents who had not completed high school. However, it became apparent by the early 1990s that JOBS was overemphasizing remediation. Many clients were in school, but few were going to work. States were impatient to raise participation and work (Lurie, 1996, pp. 580–584). Evaluations of the 1990s suggested that programs stressing "work first" realized larger gains in employment and earnings than those stressing education and training (Riccio, Friedlander, and Freeman 1994; Freedman and Friedlander 1995).

In Wisconsin, state policy documents initially said that the purpose of JOBS was to target "the most difficult to employ." This meant that "Job Search is not the primary activity." Rather, there should be "an emphasis on using education and training . . . as means to improve the employability of welfare recipients." In 1990, the legislature endorsed the idea that the aim was "long-term training/education," including postsecondary programs that might last more than 2 years (Wisconsin DHSS, 1990, pp. 2, 17–20).

But by the early 1990s, reflecting the national trend, DHSS pressed JOBS contractors to place more clients in work. According to state officials, in 1994 the contractors were expected to place 12 percent of one-parent cases and 40 percent of two-parent cases in "work components," which included CWEP, Work Experience (another form of unpaid work), Work Supplementation (where welfare subsidizes a private-sector job), or on-the-job training (OJT). In 1995, these figures were raised to 18 and 50—later 60—percent, respectively.

Restraints were placed on higher education, which had allowed some recipients to go to school for years without taking a job. In 1995, education programs were limited to 2 years except in unusual circumstances, and 4-year programs were disallowed. In that year also, clients in education or training programs for less than 20 hours a week were expected to undertake work components as well, and in Milwaukee 75 percent of all clients in education or training were expected to be in work components or working part-time. Finally in 1996, the inauguration of Pay for Performance required that recipients "earn" their grants through near-full-time hours of work activities. PFP forced counties to abandon the remediation strategy, if they had not already done so.

Such policies could be effective, of course, only if managers had the work assignments available to absorb the clients shifted out of education and training. When PFP came on line in 1996, administrators in Milwaukee struggled to create CWEP slots on a large scale to guarantee that those who were now expected to work could do so in government if they failed to find private jobs. Again, the implementation of work tests—though designed in part to reduce the rolls—hinged critically on bureaucratic resources. "The revolution is PFP," one manager told me. "It's all over after that. If we can do PFP, W-2 will be a cakewalk."

The shift in priorities is dramatized in Table 2. It shows the proportions of JOBS clients that Wisconsin and the country as a whole assigned to various activities, or components, over 1991–1996. The figures show, first, that Wisconsin sharply cut the percentage of clients involved in assessment. This was a sign of tightened administration, since assessment delays the assignment of participants to activities. The state never assigned many people to job training, but zeroed out even those. It sharply cut its use of remedial education and postsecondary education. Meanwhile, it built up job search. Work readiness is a motivational activity that declined, probably in favor of job search. Work supplementation and CWEP grew alongside job search, although less strongly. In most cases, the shifts are sharper than seen for the country as a whole.

TABLE 2
Percentages of JOBS Clients Assigned to Various Components in Wisconsin and the United States, 1991–1996

Component	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Assessment						
WI	42.5	10.2	12.4	8.2	6.7	4.6
US	21.3	16.5	17.6	12.5	11.1	10.3
Job Training						
WI	2.4	3.2	3.1	3.7	0.0	0.0
US	14.5	15.8	15.4	15.8	15.8	13.4
Remedial Education						
WI	17.8	15.9	16.6	14.6	12.2	9.6
US	25.6	24.5	23.3	23.9	22.7	19.7
Postsecondary Education						
WI	21.1	24.4	22.7	25.7	16.7	12.1
US	19.4	14.9	15.7	18.8	16.7	13.7
Job Search						
WI	13.8	14.8	13.4	15.8	22.6	37.9
US	11.9	9.4	8.0	5.5	6.1	9.0
Work Readiness						
WI	5.9	4.2	2.8	3.5	3.6	2.3
US	5.9	4.5	4.5	5.2	6.2	7.4
Work Supplementation						
WI	0.4	1.0	1.2	2.3	1.6	3.0
US	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.3
CWEP						
WI	2.8	3.3	3.7	4.9	5.2	14.0
US	2.8	3.7	4.3	3.6	3.8	8.8

Sources: U.S. Administration for Children and Families; U.S. Congress, *1996 Green Book: Background Material and Data on Programs within the Jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 4, 1996), pp. 420–421; U.S. Congress, *1998 Green Book* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, May 19, 1998), pp. 482–483.

Note: Data are for federal fiscal years. Remedial education includes high school, GED, and ESL. Job training includes job skills and vocational training. Postsecondary education includes both assigned and self-initiated. CWEP means Community Work Experience Program and includes other unpaid work. OJT is omitted because it was very small and changed little.

DIVERSION

A final policy change is that the state tried to divert needy families from going on aid at all. The reasoning was that, although most families that sought welfare were needy enough to qualify, few had exhausted other possibilities for income. By seeking support from friends, family, or local charities, or by going to work, most could avoid welfare. Under Work First, developed in Grant and Kenosha Counties and instituted elsewhere in 1994–95, applicants for aid had to spend 2 weeks looking for jobs while their papers were processed; many obtained jobs and never went on aid. In 1995, applicants for two-parent AFDC and for one-parent AFDC in Milwaukee had to spend 8 weeks looking for work if they went on the rolls.

In 1996, the requirement to look for work before one's application was approved was extended under Self-Sufficiency First (SSF), a companion to Pay for Performance. Work First had applied only to applicants mandatory for JOBS, and the sanction for noncooperation was only denial of the noncooperator's share of the grant. Under SSF, all applicants had to spend 30 days looking for work prior to receiving aid, and the penalty for noncooperation was loss of the entire grant. Note that the door to aid was not simply closed. Rather, "resource specialists" worked with applicants to arrange some way to meet their needs other than going on welfare. Again, even the effort to curb dependency required an expansion of the bureaucracy.

DHSS figures show that during 1995, 35 to 55 percent of applicants for AFDC in the counties running Work First were "diverted." That is, they were potentially eligible for AFDC but were talked out of it by the resource specialist, failed to complete their applications, or got a job before going on the rolls. Of course, many applicants for aid always fail to follow through, and there are no statewide numbers prior to Work First to prove that the incidence increased. But local and state staff say it did. In Racine, which did compile figures, 75 to 80 percent of applications had traditionally been approved.

Under Work First in September 1995, that rate fell to between 29 and 59 percent, depending on how many of the initial contacts would have filed papers under the earlier rules (data from Wisconsin DHSS).

One apparent cost of diversion, however, was that participation in JOBS fell. In October 1993, state data show that 86 percent of recipients referred to JOBS were enrolled in the program. Two years later, the rate was only 69 percent. The reason was not that administration had loosened; it was getting tighter, with fewer clients inactive (data from Wisconsin DHSS). State officials say that one factor was that the shift to the CARES computer system in 1994 lowered apparent participation for technical reasons. Another was that the change in the age-of-child rule earlier in 1995 sharply increased the pool of clients mandatory for JOBS, thus reducing the enrollment rate. But the major explanation was probably that the new work and diversion policies caused more recipients to leave welfare quickly. They would go on aid and be referred to JOBS, but leave welfare before they could enroll in the program. (Note: These data show enrollment in a single month. In Table 1, JOBS participation is measured over a year, and it required activity in components beyond enrollment, so those numbers run lower than for enrollment.)

MOTIVATING THE BUREAUCRACY

According to our model of top-down implementation, success will vary with the capability and commitment of the agencies that carry out programs. The Wisconsin welfare bureaucracy, both state and local, handled the complexities of the new work policies and the many Thompson experiments with impressive expertise. But many of its personnel preferred the less demanding style of welfare that had prevailed prior to 1986. Many opposed the new work requirements, suspecting that they would lead only to hardship (Kendrick, 1993, pp. 168–173, 201–202, 223–224).

Thompson and his lieutenants relied on the bureaucracy, but they recognized these doubts. In an interview, Gerald Whitburn, secretary of DHSS between 1991 and 1995, remarked on the need to "bring the bureaucracy along." This the state did with funding incentives. In 1994, counties were required to "earn" 55 percent of their JOBS funding for two-parent cases by placing these clients in jobs or work

components. They gained $600 per full-time job placement, $300 per part-time placement, and $200 per month for placements in work components. In 1995, this performance pool rose to cover 60 percent of two-parent JOBS monies and 20 percent of the much larger budget for one-parent AFDC, and the payments per placement also rose. These incentives were the lever behind the plan requirements mentioned above.

The state also imposed a novel system of bureaucratic competition on the agencies that ran JOBS in Milwaukee, which it viewed as underperformers. During the first half of 1994, six of the providers were reorganized into two teams, one led by the local welfare department, the other by Goodwill Industries. The budget was divided between them and they were told to compete to achieve job placements and other goals, with the results to affect funding in the next fiscal cycle. Clients were allocated randomly between the two teams, to ensure a fair test. Faced with this ultimatum, each team scrambled to call in unassigned clients and assign people to job search as they had never done before. Job entries soared. By the time the competition ended in June 1994, placements were 29 percent above, and full-time placements 38 percent above, the level for the same period in 1993 (State of Wisconsin, 1994, p. 28). No other change could explain this.

The providers disliked the competition. They preferred a cooperative system where everyone worked together to run JOBS. Accordingly, in 1995 the state replaced the teams with incentive payments similar to those set for other counties in 1994. Again, agencies scrambled to make placements, because now they earned money by doing so. Job entries again soared to as much as twice the monthly level achieved in 1994. For all of 1995, the city achieved 7,400 jobs, a 52 percent rise over 1994 (data from the Private Industry Council of Milwaukee County).

Finally, in December1995, county welfare departments were told that they had to reduce the AFDC caseload up to 25 percent and achieve other goals between September 1995 and August 1996 in order to be assured of selection to administer W-2. The 25 percent target was reduced somewhat for counties with difficult caseloads or which had already reduced their caseloads substantially. The other goals included placing high proportions of clients in work and work components, cutting AFDC

spending, and serving as a pilot for the Thompson experiments. The vast majority of counties met the standards, but in nine counties, including Milwaukee, control of W-2 was turned over to private agencies (Kaplan, 2000, p. 80). By these pressures and suasions, Wisconsin's leaders attuned the bureaucracy more fully to their goals.

THE EFFECTS OF WORK REQUIREMENTS

The purpose of the new requirements was to cause more recipients to enter employment, thus reducing dependency and poverty. The final test of implementation is whether those effects occurred. Experimental evaluations in other localities show that mandatory work programs do reduce dependency, particularly when programs enforce participation and insist on actual work (Gueron and Pauly, 1991). Studies within Wisconsin suggest that WEJT or JOBS had little effect on the rolls through 1990. The inauguration of these programs may actually have slowed caseload fall (Mead, 1999, pp. 604–606; Pawasarat and Quinn, 1993). That is not surprising, given that in these years the programs stressed education and training over actual employment.

That changed with the shift toward higher participation and work first. Table 3 shows that by the mid-1990s, there clearly is an inverse association between "engagement" in JOBS and the caseload for the state as a whole. As engagement rose, the caseload fell.

Over the entire period 1986–1994, counties with higher proportions of recipients active in JOBS (and fewer inactive) than the average county also had more caseload fall, even controlling for the labor market and other factors. This cross-sectional association does not, strictly speaking, explain the downward trend for the state as a whole. But it is consistent with Table 3 and with what local welfare officials say—welfare reform joined with a stronger economy and other factors drove dependency down (Mead, 1999, pp. 602–604, 606–612).

Recipients left by several routes, all of them tied to JOBS. One was entering employment. Despite a falling caseload, JOBS achieved rising job entries—16,067 in 1994, 19,504 in 1995, and

TABLE 3
Numbers of JOBS Participants and AFDC Cases, Wisconsin, 1994–1996

	JOBS Participants		AFDC Cases	
Year	Number	Percentage Change over Prior Year	Number	Percentage Change over Prior Year
1994	29,862		76,217	
1995	32,913	10.2	70,604	-7.4
1996	39,787	20.9	55,501	-21.4

Sources: Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development; U.S. Administration for Children and Families.

Note: Years are calendar years. Figures for participants and cases are monthly averages for the years.

23,280 in 1996. Although Milwaukee had traditionally lagged the state, the increase in the city now was even larger than elsewhere, as the demanding policies of 1995–96 took effect. After 1996, job placements fell, probably due to an accelerated caseload drop in 1997–98 as W-2 was implemented (data from Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development). Like the caseload fall, the statewide growth in job entries jibes with a cross-sectional association. In 1993, counties with higher proportions of JOBS clients enrolled and in job search or job readiness activities also had higher proportions entering jobs and leaving the rolls, even controlling for the demographics of the caseload and the labor market (Mead, 1997, pp. 119–120).

A second route was diversion. As applicants for aid were confronted more immediately with the demand to work or to make other arrangements for themselves, more did so. This depressed new entries to the rolls and, as departures continued, drove the caseload down. In the 18 counties that instituted Work First in October 1994, the caseload had fallen 40 percent since January 1987. It then fell another 51 percent just in the next 2 years as more clients got jobs or avoided applying for AFDC under the new policies (data from Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development). SSF and PFP accelerated the caseload fall statewide. Between March 1996, when they were implemented, and September 1997, when W-2 began, the number of people on the rolls plummeted from 175,541 to 88,575, or 50 percent (data from U.S. Administration for Children and Families).

A third route was sanctions. Recipients can be removed from the rolls for failure to fulfill administrative requirements linked to aid. In a study of benefit terminations in1996, Wisconsin had the greatest number—5,700—of 33 states examined. This may suggest that large numbers of clients were in conflict with the program. Actually, in the vast majority of cases, clients simply failed to enroll in JOBS or to appear for assigned activities, and then their grants were reduced or terminated (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1997a, pp. 20–32). In the early 1990s, counties with higher sanctioning levels typically had more caseload fall (Mead, 1999, pp. 611–612).

By all routes, the number of case closures came to exceed openings. In the mid-1980s, at the height of the caseload, around 20,000 cases went on and off the rolls in a single quarter. By late 1989,

both entries and exits had dropped almost in half, suggesting that most of the short-time cases—those likeliest to have other options—had already left the rolls. Entries dropped again sharply in 1995, after the diversion programs began, and again in 1996 when SSF and PFP came on line, while exits rose. The difference between entries and exits grew to from 2,000 to 7,000 cases a year, and it was this gap, year after year, that drove the rolls down (data from Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development).

Work enforcement helps to explain not only why the Wisconsin rolls fell but why they did so far more than in other states. Nationally, caseloads rose sharply in most states between 1989 and 1994, then fell in most between 1994 and 1998. States that had the least rise in the first period and the greatest fall in the second tended to be those that had high or rising activity levels and high or rising levels of job search in JOBS, alongside favorable economies and other factors (Mead, 2000a).

Did caseload fall also reduce poverty or have other favorable social effects? There is no strict proof, but research to date is encouraging. Surveys indicate that over 60 percent of recipients who have left welfare are working (State of Wisconsin, 1999). That level is no better than in other states (Brauner and Loprest, 1999), but it has been achieved despite an unusually great caseload fall. Many of the less-employable recipients who would still be on welfare in other urban states have left in Wisconsin, making the high work level more notable.

Administrative data suggest that most recipients lose income on balance when they first leave welfare and remain poor. But income then rises and poverty falls as earnings grow over time (Cancian et al., 2000). When asked, most leavers report little change in income but say they are better off overall (State of Wisconsin, 1999). In a survey of 13 states in 1997, Wisconsin had the highest work levels among its low-income parents as well as the lowest child poverty rate (Urban Institute, 1999). That is at least consistent with, if it does not prove, good effects.

DISCUSSION

The Wisconsin case confirms the top-down hypothesis that programs will achieve their formal goals more fully when the political and financial resources behind them increase, and when program design is improved. Wisconsin achieved work enforcement when it decided to take that mission seriously, developed a bureaucracy equal to the task, and made its programs more demanding. This success is the more impressive because it involves just the kind of complex, human service program where, in the earlier literature, implementation seemed often to fail (Derthick, 1972; Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973). Previous top-down successes often involved regulatory programs—such as school busing or voting rights—where a strong legal mandate was enough to compel change at the local level (Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1983). Here, government had to gear up to enroll large numbers of people and then equip and motivate them to work. Legal mandates were part of the story, but equally important was bureaucratic statecraft—the development of a strong, efficient, and motivated administrative structure.

One could also model the change using Matland's (1995) ambiguity-conflict model. Prior to the mid-1980s, welfare work involved "experimental implementation." No one had defined goals or means closely. How mandatory should participation be, as against voluntary? Was the aim immediate employment or preparing clients for "better" jobs later? Disagreements in Madison were muted, and decisions were largely abandoned to the local level. But after welfare became a crisis, state policymakers took command. They focused on a work strategy, agreed quickly to enforce higher participation, then later to promote "work first" and diversion. Implementation now entered the "administrative" mode where issues are more technical and funding is the chief determinant of success or failure (Matland, 1995). By funding and staffing its programs amply, and by motivating local agencies to get on board, Wisconsin overrode all obstacles.

That work requirements were enforced and had good effects does not establish that Wisconsin's policies were optimal. One might have persevered with the early focus of WEJT and JOBS on education and training. On the evaluation evidence, this would have produced less caseload decline in the short run

than "work first," but it might have produced more higher-paying jobs for the poor in the long term. Some recent programs that stressed education and higher incomes more than Wisconsin have produced strong impacts (Scrivener et al., 1998; Knox, Miller, and Gennetian, 2000). Such programs, however, still must enforce participation and some level of work as a condition of benefits. So the bureaucratic challenges remain.

The success of implementation is well forecast by the implementation literature. It was critical that goals were substantially agreed upon at the top. The bureaucracy did not entirely support the reform at first, but it was subject to persuasion. Local agencies were capable and well-funded. To judge from this case, however, the implementation literature says too little about the general governmental attributes that help to bring favorable conditions about. There was agreement on goals in Wisconsin for a reason: The state's Progressive tradition caused politicians to focus more on solving a recognized problem than on partisan advantage. The fact that the bureaucracy was capable and well-funded also reflected this Progressive past. The state's tradition of leadership in social policy innovation also helped (Mead, 2000c).

Gifted institutions are not easily willed into being, even when a policy problem is pressing. Most other urban states have proven unable to change welfare much, either because they could not agree politically about what to do or because their agencies failed to overcome their own divisions and inefficiencies (Nathan, 1993; Norris and Thompson, 1995). PRWORA put new pressure on states with large caseloads to promote work and reduce dependency. Their leaders may wish to undertake steps like Wisconsin's, but the political and bureaucratic obstacles to doing so may be prohibitive. It is easier to make policy than to implement it, past research says. Just as significant, it is easier to implement a specific policy than to improve the general capacity of a regime.

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